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SUBJECT: HFAC CHAIRMAN BERMAN MEETS DUMA IRC CHAIRMAN KOSACHEV:
U.S.-RUSSIA, GEORGIA, UKRAINE, NATO, POST-START, CFE, IRAN

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Duma International Relations Committee Chair Kosachev told House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Berman October 14 that the difficult state of U.S.-Russian relations was due to Russia's "disappointment" over European security structures following the end of the Cold War. He said that mistakes had been made "on both sides" in Georgia, but lamented that Russia continued to receive the bulk of the international community's condemnation. He claimed that Russia had had to recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetian independence to prevent Georgia from using military force to regain the two areas, and stressed that NATO membership should not be used as a means of conflict resolution. He urged that the U.S. not make the same error with Ukraine, and called for the resumption of negotiations on a post-START agreement and the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty (CFE). Chairman Berman expressed concern about Iran's disruptive role in the Middle East and stressed the need for the U.S. and Russia to cooperate to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons. Kosachev said he had received a letter from the Iranian Embassy on the status of the Iran-IAEA talks. The two Chairmen agreed to consider holding a joint committee meeting after the U.S. elections. End Summary.

Disappointment with West's Approach to Russia

¶2. (SBU) During a two-hour cordial meeting in Moscow October 14, House Foreign Affairs Committee (HFAC) Chairman Howard Berman, the Ambassador and HFAC staff discussed a wide range of issues, including U.S.-Russia relations, Georgia, Ukraine, NATO enlargement, a post-START Treaty agreement, the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty (CFE), and Iran, with Duma International Relations Committee Chair Konstantin Kosachev, First Deputy Chair Leonid Slutskiy (LDPR) and Duma staff. Noting that Chairman Berman was the highest-ranking USG official to visit Russia since the conflict in Georgia, Kosachev emphasized the importance of continuing regular Duma-Congress discussions. He said that current "complications" in the relationship were not based, as some in the U.S. believed, on Russia overestimating its oil- and gas-wealth-generated influence, but on its disappointment with global security constructs since the end of the Cold War. Russia had offered to work as a partner with the West, withdrawing Russian bases from Cuba, Vietnam, and eastern Europe, fulfilling treaty commitments ("until the breakdown of negotiations over the CFE Treaty"), and not intervening in former Soviet states ("until Georgia"). In contrast, the U.S. and the West had enlarged NATO to Russia's borders, invaded Iraq, established bases in eastern Europe, and taken actions that undermined Russia's security. Putin's February 2007 Munich speech had been misinterpreted as the "Russian empire coming back" with many in the West seeing it as a challenge that required opposition. If people in the West continued to see Russia this way, Kosachev contended, there would be more conflicts between us.

¶3. (SBU) Noting that following 9/11, U.S. foreign policy may have been more focused on the Middle East, Chairman Berman agreed it was important to continue the inter-parliamentary dialogue between the U.S. and Russia. He suggested the global financial crisis and dispute over Georgia demonstrated the necessity of maintaining more

regular communication between the U.S. and Russia at all levels. The two countries had fundamental concerns in common, such as nuclear proliferation, terrorism, energy security, and climate change, and would be better able to address such problems through cooperation. Few people in the U.S. believed this was a uni-polar world in which America could achieve its goals without partners and allies.

No New Cold War

¶4. (SBU) Chairman Berman pushed back on reports that the U.S. wanted to diminish Russia's security, saying the U.S. did not want to return to the Cold War, but noted that some of the rhetoric in Russia about "spheres of influence" or "spheres of interest," seemed to reflect Cold War thinking.

Georgia: Mistakes Made By Both Sides

¶5. (SBU) Kosachev said the conflict in Georgia had been in neither Russia nor the U.S.'s interest. The military option had been a "nightmare" and "worst case scenario" for Russia, but Moscow had had no choice but to intervene. He lamented that it was "unfair" that people in the West had blamed Russia so strongly for its intervention. Russia had lost 13 peacekeepers within the first three days, in addition to the civilian casualties. This fact had been ignored in U.S. statements, which had caused a lot of resentment in Russia. "We see reports that both countries made mistakes, overreacted and were responsible for the conflict. We can accept this," Kosachev said, but in public statements, it seemed that "Saakashvili was supported by the rest of the world and Russia was not."

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¶6. (SBU) Kosachev reiterated arguments that the crisis had begun with Kosovo's declaration of independence in February and subsequent recognition by many states. He argued that Georgia had been preparing to use military force well before August 7, and Russia had tried to warn the West that a military confrontation was possible, but the West had not listened. The GOR had tried to avoid military confrontation until the very end, Kosachev said, by urging Saakashvili to sign on to a non-use of force agreement, and through shuttle diplomacy by Russian special envoy Popov. But other countries had not supported Russia's efforts. Stressing that he did not think the U.S. had "charged up" Saakashvili to start military operations, Kosachev said he did believe the U.S. could have done much more to prevent the attack, and that Saakashvili had misinterpreted signals from Washington. He dismissed reports that Russian tanks had already moved into the Roki tunnel by August 7, asking if this were the case, why hadn't the Georgian military simply bombed the tunnel instead of Tskhinvali?

Recognition Necessary to Prevent Georgian Use of Force

¶7. (SBU) Kosachev said public statements saying Georgia's territorial integrity was "not an issue for discussion" continued to support Saakashvili. Now, the only way of restoring Georgia's territorial integrity was by force. Yet Saakashvili continued to press it. Russia had had to recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetian independence to prevent Georgia from using military force to regain the two areas.

NATO Not Mechanism for Conflict Resolution

¶8. (SBU) Asking whether NATO had planned to take Georgia into the Alliance with or without Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Kosachev contended that NATO membership should not be a mechanism for conflict resolution. Giving Georgia "signals" on NATO membership had created difficult conditions to resolve the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. This was why Russia had opposed MAP for Georgia; not because Russia was trying to stop Georgia's path to democracy.

LDPR Slutskiy's "We Couldn't Fight with Slingshots"

¶9. (SBU) Likening the conflict in Georgia to NATO's actions on Kosovo, LDPR Representative Slutskiy insisted Russia had not used disproportionate force in Georgia. The GOR had had information that Georgia was planning a large-scale attack on Abkhazia similar to the operation in Tskhinvali, so the GOR had needed to respond forcefully to prevent another major loss of life.

Congressional Reaction Restrained

¶10. (SBU) In response to Kosachev's complaint about the Congressional response to Russia's actions in Georgia, Chairman Berman said the Congress's reaction had been "relatively restrained." The Congress had approved a package of economic assistance to help rebuild Georgia's economy and provide humanitarian aid, but had not approved the provision of military assistance to Georgia or imposed sanctions on Russia.

Don't Make Same Mistake: Ukraine, NATO, START, CFE

¶11. (SBU) Kosachev insisted Russia fully recognized Ukraine's territorial integrity, but stressed that Crimea and the stationing of the Black Sea Fleet was a very difficult issue for Moscow. He said Ukrainian President Yushchenko was trying to provoke more confrontation with Russia by limiting the teaching of Russian language and culture, and issuing decrees limiting the Black Sea Fleet's movements. He warned that if the U.S. supported Ukraine's "provocations," and sped up NATO accession for Kyiv, it could lead to a conflict.

¶12. (SBU) The best way to avoid the "mistakes" that were made in Georgia, Kosachev said, were to:
-- take a pause in NATO enlargement to Georgia and Ukraine, and understand that if the U.S. and Europe supported a MAP, "you will lose Russia;"
-- start a serious process to negotiate a post-START Treaty agreement before its expiration in December, 2009; and
-- Restart discussions on the CFE Treaty. "Whether we liked it or not," Kosachev said, the situation had changed with the war in Georgia and if the NATO countries insisted on keeping the linkage to Georgia and Moldova, the Treaty would die. This was in neither Russia's nor the West's interests, he claimed.

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Middle East, Iran and 123 Agreement

¶13. (SBU) Chairman Berman expressed concern about Iran's destabilizing role in the Middle East, but stressed that if Iran were to acquire a nuclear weapons capability, it would have much more far-reaching consequences. He emphasized the importance of maintaining international unity against a nuclear-armed Iran, with Russia a key member of such a coalition. In response to a complaint by Slutskiy that Congress had been opposed to the 123 Agreement, Berman said his Committee had approved it, subject to some concerns about Russian-Iranian cooperation, but said that it had been a good decision to withdraw it and let a new Administration re-submit it.

¶14. (SBU) Kosachev said he had received a letter from the Iranian Embassy in Moscow regarding the status of talks between Iran and the IAEA. The letter had not been translated yet, but he agreed to provide Chairman Berman with a copy.

Inter-Parliamentary Talks

¶15. (SBU) Both Chairman Berman and Kosachev agreed that dialogue between the two committees was useful. Kosachev proposed the committees meet in Moscow after the U.S. elections. "the sooner, the better." Chairman Berman said he would talk to his colleagues on

the HFAC and get back to Kosachev.

116. (SBU) The delegation has cleared this cable.

BEYRLE